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Inside Telesales: How to Sell More to Your Installed Base

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With customer acquisition costs escalating, companies are relying on their inside telesales groups to solicit their installed customer base. This group often is responsible for 80 percent of the customer base.

With an adequate infrastructure, solid management and effective marketing, an outbound department can grow customer accounts. But few achieve their potential because of poor database integrity, lack of defined customer milestones, inefficient direct marketing lead generation and low loyalty.

Team experience. Though it's a natural tendency to promote a successful field sales person to inside sales manager, a good outside salesperson is not the best personality for inside sales management. You're better off with someone strong in marketing and relationship-building skills rather than sales experience. You can always send them to a seminar on account development/sales skills.

Your telesales staff must be trained to solve any customer issue and be accommodating. Those trained in service industries such as hospitality and travel do well. Their job is to give your customers what they want to foster a relationship and nudge them from tier to tier.

The telemarketing team should be fueled by frequent marketing activities designed to elicit a response from their respective customer groups. And they should be motivated with visible quarterly incentives.

Database integrity. The telesales database must contain all customer information and be capable of supporting all telesales comments and marketing efforts. It must accurately categorize each customer as an Ideal Customer, Non-Ideal Customer or Uncertain. And within each account three contacts should be identified: the implementer or end user, the executive who signs for the purchase order, and the C-level executive who gains the competitive advantage by using your product or service. The telesales staff should be trained to probe each account and keep each record current. Information is the key to telesales marketing.

Account development. Along with categorizing each customer, they also should be identified by their service level to clarify how far they're into your company for product or service. This is account development tiering, and it establishes each customer's point of entry and subsequent investments into your company. Where do you want to take them? Determine each grid level by the product/service they have to buy, along with the business benefit to each of the three contacts. This gives the telesales team a grid to reference as they work to migrate each customer to a newer level.

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Telesales needs total control over the telesales accounts and must be responsible for delivering quarterly company messaging. Their customers must receive communication only from their telesales representative. Ownership is vital.

Structured correctly, strong account tiering can provide accurate forecasts and new revenue sources by developing new applications and new markets for the higher tiers.

Fuel telesales with DM. No telesales person can reach his or her assigned customer base effectively. And you don't want them to try. Have them focus on the top 20 percent of their accounts and leave the rest to relationship marketing.

Lead generation can be accomplished in a number of mediums but should include these fundamental elements: a provocative offer, easy due diligence and peer referencing. For maximum effectiveness, lead generation objectives should change monthly. Here are examples of objectives that have been successful:

- Upgrade 20 percent of certain customer installations to new version within 60 days.
- Sell \$X revenue of add-on services to a certain customer segment.
- Identify new users or recommenders within an account but give a free personal offer to all new customers within existing accounts.

Customers respond to telesales only if they think they will benefit. They must understand what's in it for them. If they are saddled with a poor impression of your company or have been courted recently by your competition, invest in a customer loyalty program before investing in an inside telesales operation.

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